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THE GOLD THREAD





ERIC IN THE FOREST.

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# The Gold Thread

A Story for the Young

By  
Norman Macleod, D.D.



Glasgow  
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## TO MY CHILDREN.

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**I** DEDICATE this story to you, because it was for you I first wrote it, and to you I first read it among the green hills of Moffat. It was afterwards printed in *Good Words*, and now you see it again appears as a little book for other children, who, I hope, will like it as much as you do.

I wish to help and encourage you, and all who read this story, to learn the great lesson which it is intended to teach; that lesson is, that we



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should always trust God and do what is right, and thus hold fast our gold thread in spite of every temptation and danger, being certain that in this way only will God lead us in safety and peace to His home.

Now, God gives each of you this gold thread to hold fast in your own house or in school, in the nursery or in the play-ground, on every day and in every place. His voice in your heart, and in His word, will also tell you always what is right, if you only listen to it. You, too, will be constantly tempted in some way or other to give up your gold thread, and to be selfish, disobedient, lazy, or untruthful. Many things, in short, will tempt you to do your own will rather than God's will.

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You already know, and I hope you will always love and remember, those true stories in the Bible about the good men of the olden time, whose lives are there written. Now, what shewed that they were good? It was this, that *they trusted God, and did what was right*. If they ever let this their gold thread go, they lost their way and became unhappy; but when they held it fast, it led them in a way of peace and safety. To see how true this is, you have only to recall such stories as those of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Job, Caleb and Joshua, Samuel, David and Jonathan, Elijah and Elisha, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and his three companions, &c., &c., with those told you in the Book of Acts,



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To My Children.

not to mention the history of Jesus Christ, the perfect example for us all.

That you, my dear children, may be "followers of those who through faith and patience now inherit the promises," and thus be "followers of God as dear children," is the constant prayer of your mother, and of your father.

NORMAN MACLEOD.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER—  
WOLF  
THE SWINEHERD.

ONCE upon a time,  
a boy lost his way  
in a vast forest that  
filled many a valley,  
and passed over many  
a hill, a rolling sea of  
leaves for miles and miles  
further than the eye could  
reach. His name was  
Eric, son of the good King  
Magnus. He was dressed  
in a blue velvet dress,



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with a gold band round his waist, and his fair locks in silken curls waved from his beautiful head. But his hands and face were scratched, and his clothes torn with the briars, as he ran here and there like one much perplexed. Sometimes he made his way through tangled brushwood, or crossed the little grassy plains in the forest, now losing himself in dark ravines, then climbing up their steep sides, or crossing with difficulty the streams that hurried through them. For a long time he kept his heart up, and always said to himself, "I shall find it, I shall find it"; until, as the day advanced, he was wearied and hungry; and every now and then he cried, "Oh, my father! where is my father! I'm lost! I'm

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lost!" Or, "Where, oh, where is my gold thread!" All day the forest seemed to him to be very sad. He had never seen it so gloomy. There was a strange sadness in the rustle of the leaves, and a sadness in the noise of the streams. He did not hear the birds sing as they used to do. But he heard the ravens croak with their hoarse voice, as their black forms swept along the precipices which here and there rose above the trees. The large hawks, too, always appeared to be wheeling over his head, pausing and fluttering as if to dart down upon him. Why was he so sad? Why was he so afraid?

But on Eric journeyed, in the hope of finding his way out of the bound-



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less forest, or of meeting some one who would be his guide. At last, the sun appeared to be near its setting, and he could see the high branches of the trees, shining like gold, as its last rays fell upon them. But underneath, the foliage was getting darker and darker; the birds were preparing to sleep, and everything soon became so still that he could hear his steps echoing through the wood, and when he stopped, he heard his heart beating, or a leaf falling; but nowhere did he see a house, and no human being had he met since morning. Then the wind suddenly began to rise, and he heard it at first creeping along the tree-tops like a gentle whisper, and by and by to call louder and louder for the storm to come.

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Dark clouds gathered over the sky, and rushed along chased by the winds, that were soon to fight with the giant trees.

At last, he sat down at the root of a great old oak, burying his face in his hands, not knowing what to do. He then tried to climb the tree, in order to spend the night among its branches, in case wild beasts should attack him. But as he was climbing it, he heard some one singing with a loud voice. Listening attentively, and looking eagerly through the leaves, he saw a boy apparently older than himself, dressed in rough shaggy clothes, made from skins of wild animals. His long matted hair escaped over his cheeks from under a black bearskin cap. With a short

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thick stick he was driving a herd of swine through the wood. "Hey there, you black porker!" cried the boy, as he threw a stone at some pig which was running away. "Get along, you lazy long-snout!" he shouted to another, as he came thump on its back with his cudgel. And then he sung this song with a loud voice which made the woods ring:—

"Oh, there's nothing half so fine,  
As to drive a herd of swine,  
And through the forest toddle,  
With nothing in my noddle,  
But a rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up,  
halloo!

"When I wish to have some fun,  
Then I make the porkers run,

Till they gallop, snort, and wheeze,  
Among the leafy trees;  
Oh, rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up,  
halloo!

"How their backs begin to bristle,  
When I shout aloud and whistle!  
How they kick at every lick  
That I give them with my stick!  
Oh, rub-a-dub, rub-dub, hey-up,  
halloo!"

"Get along, you rascals," cried the savage-looking herd, "or I'll kill and roast you before your time." But soon the herd, with his swine, were concealed from Eric's sight by the wood; though he still heard his "rub-a-dub" chorus, to which he beat time with a sort of rude drum, made with a dried skin and hoop.



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Eric determined to make his acquaintance, or at all events to follow him to some house; so he descended from the tree, and ran off in the direction from which he heard the song coming. He soon overtook him.

"Hollo!" said the wild-looking lad, with as much astonishment as if Eric had fallen from the clouds: "Who? where from? where to?" "I have lost my way in the wood," said Eric, "and want you to guide me." "To Ralph?" asked the swineherd. "Ralph! pray, who is he?" "Master, chief, captain, everything, everybody," replied the young savage. "I will go anywhere for shelter, as night is coming on; but I will reward you if you bring me to my father's home." "Who is your

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father, my fine fellow?" inquired the swineherd, leaning on his stick. "The king," replied Eric. "You lie, Sir Prince! Ralph is king." "I speak the truth, swineherd." The swineherd by this time was examining Eric's dress with an impudent look. "Pay me now," said he; "give me this gold band, and I will guide you." "I cannot give you this gold band, for my father gave it to me, and I have lost enough to-day. By the by, did you see a gold thread waving anywhere among the trees?" "A gold thread! what do you mean? I saw nothing but pigs until I saw you, and I shall treat you like a pig, d'ye hear? and lick you too, for I have no time to put off. So give me your band. Come, be quick!" said



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he, with his fierce face, and holding up his stick as he came up to Eric. "Keep off, swineherd; don't touch me!" "Don't touch you! why shouldn't I touch you? Do you see this stick? How would you like to have it among your fine curls, as I drive it among the pigs' bristles?" And he began to flourish it over his head, and to press nearer and nearer. "Once, twice, when I say thrice, if you do not unbuckle, I shall save you the trouble, and leave you to the wild beasts, who would like a tender bit of prince's flesh better than pork. Come; once! twice!" Eric was on his guard, and said, "I shall fight you, you young robber, till death, rather than give you this band,—so keep off." "Thrice!" shouted the

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herd, and down came his thick cudgel, which he intended should fall on Eric's head. But Eric sprang aside, and before he could recover himself, dashed in upon him, tripped him up, and threw him on the grass, seizing him by the throat in a moment. The herd, in his efforts to get out of Eric's grasp, let go his cudgel, which Eric seized, and held over his head. "Unless you promise, Master Swineherd, to leave me alone, I may leave *you* alone with the wild beasts." "You are stronger than I thought," said the herd. "Let me up, or I shall be choked. Let me up, I say, and I promise to guide you." "I shall trust you," said Eric, "though you would not trust me. Rise!" So the herd rose, and picked



up his cap, but Eric would not give him his stick until he guided him to some house. "Come along," said he, sulkily. "What is your name?" asked Eric. "They call me Wolf. I killed a wolf once with my boar-spear." "Why, Wolf, did you try to kill me?" "Because I wanted your gold belt." "But it is a great sin to rob and kill." "Other people rob me, and would kill me too, if I did not take care of their pigs," said Wolf, carelessly. "You should fear God, Wolf." "I fear that name truly, for Ralph always swears by it when he is in a rage. But I do not know what it means." "Oh, Wolf, surely your father and mother told you about God, who made all things, and made you and me; God, who



ERIC AND SWINEHERD.



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loves us, and wishes us to love Him, and to do what is right?" "I have no father or mother," replied Wolf, "nor brothers or sisters, and I do not know God. No one cares for me but my pigs, and so I sleep with them, and eat with them." "Poor fellow!" said Eric with a look of kindness, "I am sorry for you. Here is all the money I have. Take it. I wish to shew you that I have no ill-will to you;" and Eric gave him a gold coin. Wolf gave a grunt like one of his pigs, and began his song of "Rub-a-dub." "No one ever gave me money before," remarked Wolf almost to himself, as he examined the coin on his rough hand, which looked like tanned leather. "How much is this?"



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inquired Wolf. Eric explained its value. The herd was astonished, and began to think what he could purchase with it. "It would buy a large pig," he said. He seemed very anxious to conceal the coin, and so he hid it in the top of his hairy cap. "See that tall tower," said Wolf, "which looks like a rock above the trees; that is the only house near for twenty miles round. You can reach it soon; and when you do reach it," said Wolf, speaking low, as if some one might hear him, "take my advice, and get away as fast as you can from my master Ralph, for"—and Wolf gave a number of winks, as much as to say, I know something. "What do you mean?" asked Eric. "Oh, nothing, nothing; but take

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Wolf's advice, and say to Ralph you are a beggar. Put the gold band in your pocket, and swear to remain with him, but run off when you can. Cheat him; that's my way." "It is not my way," replied Eric, "and, come what may, never can be, for a voice says to me,

"Better to die  
Than ever to lie.'"

"Ha! ha!" said Wolf; "I wish you lived with Ralph. He would teach you another lesson, my lad." "I would rather that I had you, Wolf, to live in my house. I would be kind to you, and help you to be good, and tell you about God, who lives in the sky." "And is that He who is speaking? Listen!"



Thunder began to mutter in the clouds. "Yes, it is He," replied Eric, "and if you will only listen, you can also hear Him often speak with a small, still voice in your heart." "I never heard Him," replied Wolf; "but I cannot stay longer with you, for my pigs will wander: there is a black rascal who always leads them astray. Now, king's son, give Wolf the stick; it is all he has." "Here it is to you, and I am sure you will not use it wrongly, you will try and be good, Wolf? for it will make you happy." "Humph," said Wolf, "I am happy when I get my pigs home, and Ralph does not strike me. But I must away, and see you don't tell any one you gave me money. They would rob me."

And away he ran among the trees in search of his pigs, while Eric heard his little drum, and his song of "Rub-a-dub, halloo!" die away in the distance. Another loud peal and flash of lightning made Eric start, and off he ran towards a light which now beamed from the tower. But he thought to himself, "I am much worse than that poor Wolf, for I knew what was right, and did not do it. I heard the voice, but did not attend to it. Oh, my father, why did I not obey you!"



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## CHAPTER II.

### THE ROBBER'S TOWER.

SOMETIMES he lost sight of the light, and again he caught it, till it became brighter and brighter, and very soon he came to a high rock, on the top of which was perched a tall, dark tower. After groping

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about, he found a narrow path that led up to the tower, from one of the windows of which the light was brightly shining. He ascended a flight of steep steps till he reached a massive door covered with iron. He knocked as loud as he could, when a large dog began barking furiously inside, and springing up to the door, as if it would tear it down. Then a gruff voice called out of a window over the door, "Who is there? Who disturbs me in this way?" The little boy replied, "Please, sir, I am Eric, son of King Magnus, and I have lost my way in this wood." "The son of the king, are you?" asked the voice. "That is a grand joke! Let me have a sight of you." Then the window

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was shut, and he heard footsteps coming tramp, tramp, down the stairs, and the voice said to the dog, "Lie down, hound, and don't be greedy! You would not eat a young prince, would you? Lie down, Tuscar!" The door was then opened by a fierce-looking man, with a long beard. The man bid him enter, and examined him about himself and his journey. Eric answered truly every question. Then the man rang a bell for an old woman who lived in the house, and bid her take the boy with her, and give him his supper. The old woman looked very ugly and very cross, and led him up, up, a great number of dark, gloomy stairs, until she reached a small room, with a bed and table in it, where she bade Eric

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wait till she brought him supper. The big hound followed them, and stayed in the room while the woman went away. Eric was at first afraid of the dog, he was so large and wild-looking, but he came and laid his head on his knee, and he scratched his ears, and patted him, and was very kind to him. The supper came, and the boy managed to keep a few bits of meat out of his own supper for the dog, and when the old woman went out of the room, he fed the hound, who seemed very hungry, and said to him, "Tuscar, old fellow, I like you very much. Take another bit, good dog, and be happy!" The dog wagged his tail, and looked up kindly with his large eyes, for he was thankful for his supper, and ate



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much more than Eric. "Now," said the old woman gruffly, when she took away the remains of the supper, "you have ate what would do me for a week. You won't starve, Master Prince. Go to bed." The old woman left him, but suddenly returning, she discovered Eric on his knees. As he rose, she scoffed and jeered him, and asked, "Do you always say your prayers?" "Yes, always," replied the boy. "Who taught you?" "My mother, who is dead." The old woman heaved a deep sigh, but the boy did not know why. Perhaps she used to pray when she was a little girl herself, and had given up speaking to God, or even thinking of Him, and so had become wicked; or perhaps she

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thought of some child of her own whom she had never taught to pray. She soon went away without speaking a word more, and Eric was left in darkness. He looked out through the narrow window of his room, but could see nothing but black clouds rushing over the sky. Far down he heard a stream roaring, and the wind, which now blew a gale, came booming over the tree-tops, and howling round the tower. Every now and then a flash lighted up the forest, and the thunder crashed in the sky. It was a fearful night.

Some time after, he heard footsteps at his door, and immediately the man with the beard entered, and sat down. "Do you know," he asked, "where your father is?" "No,"



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said Eric; "as I told you, I lost my way in the forest, and have been wandering all day, and cannot find him; but perhaps you will send some one to-morrow with me to shew me the way to his castle, and I am sure my kind, good father will give you a rich reward." "You are very, very far from your father's house," said the man, "and I fear you will never see him again; but come with me, and I shall shew you some beautiful things that will please you." So the man took Eric by the hand, and, carrying a lamp, he led him into a room that seemed full of gold and silver, with beautiful dresses, sparkling with diamonds, and every kind of splendour, and he said, "Stay with me, my boy, and I will give you

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all this, for I am a king too, and I will make you my heir." "Oh, no, no," said Eric; "I will never forsake my own father." The man then said, "If you stay with me, you need never go to school all day, but may amuse yourself from morning till night, and have a beautiful pony to ride, and a gun to shoot deer with, and also fishing-rods, and a servant to attend you, and any kind of meat and drink you like best. Do stay with me!" "You are very kind," said Eric, "but I cannot be happy without my father." "Come then with me, my fine fellow, and I shall shew you something different," said the man, seizing Eric firmly by the arm, and looking very angry. After walking along a passage, from the



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end of which confused noises came, a door was opened, and in a large hall, round a great oak table, sat a company of fierce-looking men, drinking from large flagons which stood before them. Their faces were red, and their eyes gleamed like fire. Ralph placed Eric on the table. One of the robbers was singing this song:—

“We’re the famous robber band—

Hurrah!

The lords of all the land—

Hurrah!

A fig for law or duty,  
If we only get our booty;  
With a fa, la, la, la, la!

“‘Every man to mind himself,’

Hurrah!

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ERIC AND ROBBERS.



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Is the rule of Captain Ralph !

Hurrah !

Then let the greatest thief  
And robber be our chief—  
With a fa, la, la, la, la !”

No wonder poor Eric trembled as he heard that lawless band thus glorying in their shame, and like demons singing their horrid song in praise of all that was most dreadful and most wicked. He had read stories of robbers, which sometimes made him think that they were fine, brave fellows ; but now that he was among them, he saw how depraved, cruel, and frightful they were. Their savage, coarse looks terrified him ; but he was held by Ralph on the table. When the song was ended,



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one of them asked, "Whom have we got here?" "Who do you think?" replied Ralph. "What would you say, my men, to a young prince,—no less than the son of our great enemy, King Magnus?" "A young prince! The son of Magnus! What a prize!" they exclaimed. "What shall we do with him?" "First of all let us have his gold belt," said Ralph, unbuckling Eric's belt. "Ha! what a pretty thing it is!" "My father gave it to me, and I don't wish to part with it. The swine-herd Wolf tried to take it from me, but I fought him, and kept it," said Eric. "Wolf is a brave young robber," replied Ralph, "and he shall have it for his trouble. In the meantime, my lad, it is mine. But

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what, my men, shall we do with the prince?" "Kill him," said one. "Starve him to death," said another. "Put his eyes out and send him back to his father," said a third. Eric prayed to God, but said nothing. "I propose," said Ralph, "to make him a captain if he will stay with us." "Never!" said Eric; "I would rather die!" "Let him die, then," said a fierce robber; "for his father hung my brother for killing one of his nobles." "I tell you what we will do with the lion's whelp," said Ralph; "let us keep him in prison, and send a message to his father, that we have him snug in a den among the mountains, and that, unless he sends us an immense ransom, we shall kill him." "That



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will do famously," said the robbers; "so off with him!" Then Ralph led the boy down stairs,—down, down, until he thought they never would stop, and at last they came to an iron door, with great bars on it, and a large lock, and he turned to Eric, and said, "I know your father, and I hate him! for he sends his soldiers after me, and tries to save travellers from me, and now I have got his son. I will keep you here till you die, or till he pays!" Then he opened the dungeon door, and thrust Eric in. When it closed, it echoed like thunder through the passages. Eric cast himself down on the dungeon floor.

All appeared to be a strange dream. Oh, how he repented having

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disobeyed his father! and how he seemed to be as bad as the dreadful robbers in having done what he pleased, and followed his own will, instead of doing what was right! About an hour after, he heard some rustling, as if high up on the wall, and a voice whispered "Eric!" "Who is there?" asked Eric, and, his little heart trembled. "Silence! quiet! it is Wolf. Here is a small window in your prison, and I have opened it outside; climb up, get out, and run for your life." Eric heard no more, but scrambled in the dark up the rough stones in the wall until he reached the window, where he looked out, and saw the stars and the woods. He soon forced his way through, and dropped down on the



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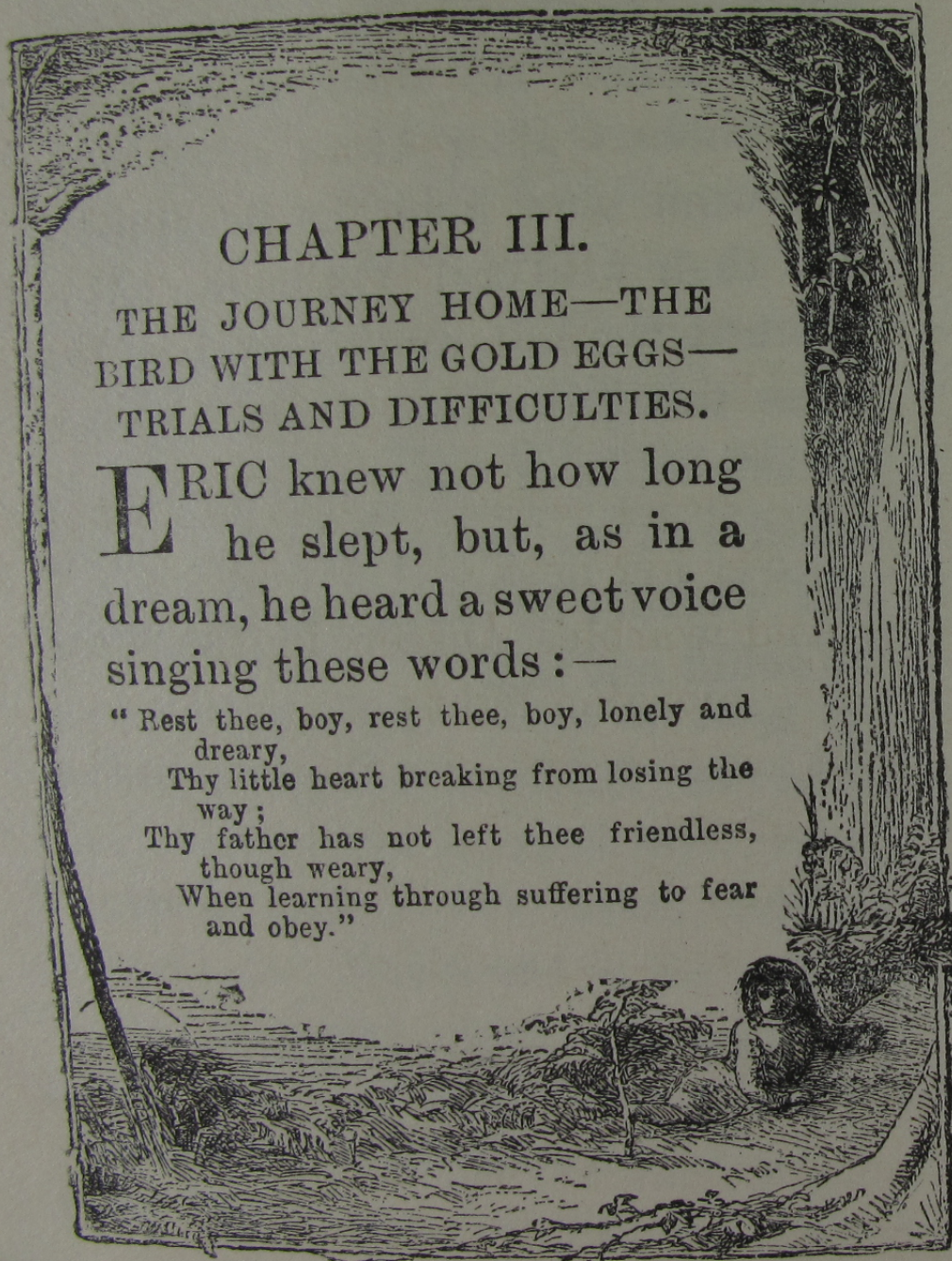
opposite side. Some one caught him in his arms. It was Wolf. "Here is your gold band, Eric. I got it from Ralph; for He who was speaking in the thunder has been saying things in my heart. You were kind to poor Wolf. Now escape! Fly! I shall close the window again. Ralph will never know how you got out, and he will not open the prison-door till after breakfast. So you have a long time. Run as long as you can along that road till you reach a hill, then cross it, until you reach a stream which you must follow downwards. The worst of the storm is over, and the night will soon be calm. Off!" "Bless you, Wolf!" said Eric; "I shall never forget you." Poor Eric! how he ran, and ran,

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beneath the stars! He felt no fatigue for a time. He thought he heard the robbers after him; every time the wind blew loud, he imagined it was their wild cry. On he ran till he reached the hill, and crossed it, and came to a green spot beneath a rock, on the banks of the stream, when he could run no more, but fell down, and whether he fainted or fell asleep he could not tell.



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### CHAPTER III.

THE JOURNEY HOME—THE  
BIRD WITH THE GOLD EGGS—  
TRIALS AND DIFFICULTIES.

**E**RIC knew not how long  
he slept, but, as in a  
dream, he heard a sweet voice  
singing these words:—

“Rest thee, boy, rest thee, boy, lonely and  
dreary,  
Thy little heart breaking from losing the  
way;  
Thy father has not left thee friendless,  
though weary,  
When learning through suffering to fear  
and obey.”

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Eric opened his eyes, but moved  
not a limb, as if under some strange  
fascination. It was early morning.  
High over head a lark was “singing  
like an angel in the clouds.” The  
mysterious voice went on in the  
same beautiful and soothing strain—

“Oh, sweet is the lark as she sings  
o’er her nest,

And warbles unseen in the clear  
morning light;

But sweeter by far is the song in the  
breast

When in life’s early morning we do  
what is right!”

Eric could neither move nor speak;  
but in his heart he confessed with  
sorrow that he had done what was  
wrong. And again the voice sang—



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“Now, darling, awaken, thou art not forsaken !

The old night is past and a new day begun ;

Let thy journey with love to thy father be taken,

And at evening thy father will welcome thee home.”

“I will arise and go to my father !” said Eric, springing to his feet. He saw beside him a beautiful lady, who looked like a picture he once saw of his mother, or like one of those angels from heaven about whom he had often read. And the lady said, “Fear not ! I know you, Eric, and how it came to pass that you are here. Your father sent you for a wise and good purpose through the

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ERIC AND THE BEAUTIFUL LADY.



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forest, and gave you hold of a gold thread to guide you, and told you never to let it go. It was your duty to him to have held it fast; but instead of doing your duty, trusting and obeying your father, and keeping hold of the thread, you let it go to chase butterflies, and gather wild-berries, and to amuse yourself. This you did more than once. You neglected your father's counsels and warnings, and because of your self-confidence and self-pleasing, you lost your thread, and then you lost your way. What dangers and troubles have you thus got into through disobedience to your father's commands, and want of trust in his love and wisdom! For had you only followed your father's directions, the gold



thread would have brought you to his beautiful castle, where there is to be a happy meeting of your friends, with all your brothers and sisters." Poor little Eric began to weep! "Listen to me, child," said the lady, kindly, "*for you cannot have peace but by doing what is right.* Know, then, that all your brothers and sisters made this very journey by help of the gold thread, and they are at home with great joy." "Oh, save me! save me!" cried Eric, and caught the lady's hand. "Yes, I will save you," said she, "if you will learn obedience. I know and love you, dear boy. I know and love your father, and have been sent by him to deliver you. I heard what you said, and know all you did, last night, and

I was very glad that you proved, in trial, your love to your father, your love of truth, and your love of others, and this makes me hope all good of you for the future. Come now with me!" And so the beautiful woman took him by the hand. The storm had passed away, and the sun was shining on the green leaves of the trees, and every drop of dew sparkled like a diamond. The birds were all warbling their morning hymns, and feeding their young ones in their nests. The streams were dancing down the rocks and through the glens. "The mountains broke forth into singing, and all the trees clapped their hands with joy." Everything thus seemed beautiful and happy to Eric, for he himself was happy at the



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thought of doing what was right, and of going home. The lady led him to a sunny glade in the wood, covered with wild flowers, from which the bees were busy gathering their honey, and she said, "Now, child, are you willing to do your father's will?" "Oh, yes!" "Will you do it, whatever dangers may await you?" "Yes!" "Well, then, I must tell you that your father has given me the gold thread which you lost; and he bids me again tell you, with his warm love, that if you keep hold of it, and follow it wherever it leads, you are sure to come to him at sunset; but if you let it go, you may wander on in this dark forest till you die, or are again taken prisoner by robbers. Know, also, that there is no other

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possible way of saving you but by your following the gold thread." "I am resolved to do my duty, come what may," said Eric. "May you be helped to do it!" said the lady. She then gave him a cake, to support him in his journey. "And now, child," she added, "one advice more I will give you, and it was given you by your father, though you forgot it; it is this—if ever you feel the thread slipping from your hands, or are yourself tempted to let it go, pray immediately, and you will get wisdom and strength to find it, to lay hold of it, and to follow it. Before we part, kneel down and ask assistance to be good and obedient, brave and patient, until you meet your father." The little boy knelt down



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and repeated the Lord's Prayer ; and as he said, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven," he felt calm and happy as he used to do when he knelt at his mother's knee, and he thought her hand was waving over him, as if to bless him. When he lifted up his head there was no one there but himself ; but he saw an old gray cross, and a GOLD THREAD was tied to it, and passed away, away, shining through the woods.

With a firm hold of his gold thread, the boy began his journey home. He passed along pathways on which the brown leaves of last year's growth were thickly strewn, and from among which flowers of every colour were springing. He crossed little brooks that ran like

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silver threads, and tinkled like silver bells. He passed under trees with great trunks, and huge branches that swept down to the ground, and waved far up in the blue sky. The birds hopped about him, and looked down upon him from among the green leaves, and they sang him songs, and some of them seemed to speak to him. He thought one large bird like a crow cried, "Good boy ! good boy !" and another whistled, "Cheer up ! cheer up !" and so he went merrily on, and very often he gave the robins and blackbirds that came near him bits of his cake. After awhile, he came to a green spot in the middle of the wood, without trees, and a footpath went direct across it, to the place where the gold



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thread was leading him, and there he saw a sight that made him wonder and pause. It was a bird about the size of a pigeon, with feathers like gold and a crown like silver, and it was slowly walking near him, and he saw gold eggs glittering in a nest among the grass a few yards off. Now, he thought, it would be such a nice thing to bring home a nest with gold eggs! The bird did not seem afraid of him, but stopped and looked at him with a calm blue eye, as if she said, "Surely you would not rob me?" He could not, however, reach the nest with his hand, and though he pulled and pulled the thread, it would not yield one inch, but seemed as stiff as a wire. "I see the thread quite plain," said the boy to himself,

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"and the very place where it enters the dark wood on the other side. I will just leap to the nest, and in a moment I shall have the eggs in my pocket, and then spring back and catch the thread again. I cannot lose it here, with the sun shining; and, besides, I see it a long way before me." So he took one step to seize the eggs; but he was in such haste that he fell and crushed the nest, breaking the eggs to pieces, and the little bird screamed and flew away, and then suddenly the birds in the trees began to fly about, and a large owl swept out of a dark glade, and cried, "Whoo—whoo—whoo—oo—oo;" and a cloud came over the sun! Eric's heart beat quick, and he made a grasp at his gold thread, but it was



not there! Another, and another grasp, but it was not there! and soon he saw it waving far above his head, like a gossamer thread in the breeze. You would have pitied him, while you could not have helped being angry with him for having been so silly and disobedient when thus tried, had you only seen his pale face, as he looked above him for his thread, and about him for the road, but could see neither! And he became so confused with his fall, that he did not know which side of the open glade he had entered, nor to which point he was travelling. But at last he thought he heard a bird chirping, "Seek—seek—seek!" and another repeating, "Try again—try again—try—try!" and then

he remembered what the lady had said to him, and he fell on his knees and told all his grief, and cried, "Oh, give me back my thread! and help me never, never, to let it go again!" As he lifted up his eyes, he saw the thread come slowly, slowly down; and when it came near, he sprang to it and caught it, and he did not know whether to laugh, or cry, or sing, he was so thankful and happy! "Ah!" said he, "I hope I shall never forget this fall!" That part of the Lord's Prayer came into his mind which says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." "Who would have thought," said he to himself, "that I was in any danger in such a beautiful, green, sunny



place as this, and so very early, too, in my journey! Oh! shame upon me!" As he proceeded with much more thought and caution, a large crow up a tree was hoarsely croaking, and seemed to say, "Beware, beware!" "Thank you, Mr. Crow," said the boy, "I shall;" and he threw him a bit of bread for his good advice. But now the thread led him through the strangest places. one was a very dark, deep ravine, with a stream that roared and rushed far down, and overhead the rocks seemed to meet, and thick bushes concealed the light, and nothing could Eric see but the gold thread, that looked like a thread of fire, though even that grew dim sometimes, until he could only feel

it in his hand. And whither he was going he knew not. At one time he seemed to be on the edge of a precipice, until it seemed as if the next step *must* lead him over, and plunge him down; but when he came to the very edge, the thread led him quite safely along it. At another, a rock which looked like a wall rose before him, and he said to himself, "Well, I must be stopped here! I shall never be able to climb up!" But just as he touched it, he found steps cut in it, and up, up, the thread guided him to the top! Then it would bring him down, down, until he once stood beside a raging stream, and the water foamed and dashed. "Now," he thought, "I must be drowned; but come what